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SUBJECT: VISIT OF HOLOCAUST ISSUES ENVOY KENNEDY TO ZAGREB

REF: ZAGREB 180

11. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Ambassador Christian Kennedy, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, was in Croatia September 19-21 to remind GoC officials of their obligations to ensure a just settlement of World War II and Communist era property claims, including those of Holocaust victims and American Citizens. While draft legislation currently under consideration by the GoC will provide U.S. citizens some rights to file claims for restitution of expropriated property, post is not optimistic that the GoC will pass this legislation anytime before parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2008.

END SUMMARY AND COMMENT

12. (SBU) As a follow up to his February 2007 visit, Ambassador Kennedy met with State Secretary Snjezana Bagic, (Ministry of Justice), SDP opposition party legal advisor Ivo Josipovic, and representatives of both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport. While hesitant to comment on specific details in a proposed draft amendment to the 1996 Law on Compensation of Property Dispossessed During Yugoslav Communist Rule, State Secretary Bagic did relay her personal belief that any amendments would ensure that all persons (foreigners and Croatians) are entitled to seek redress, provided they have not already been compensated under any preexisting bilateral agreement with the Former Yugoslavia. (NOTE: The GoC has not shared with post the text of the draft amendment. END NOTE)

13. SDP Opposition legal advisor, Ivo Josipovic, confirmed to Ambassador Kennedy that his party anticipated that Property Restitution would be on the political agenda following the elections. Josipovic commented about the complicated layers of competing claims on properties from World War II, the Communist era, and finally the conflicts of the 1990s. Josipovic indicated that the issue would require more discussion and that property restitution in Croatia did not have a simple straightforward solution. He mentioned that these problems might be best resolved on a "case by case basis."

14. Holocaust Education and Training also remained high on Ambassador Kennedy's agenda. In a meeting with the State Secretary of the Croatian Culture Ministry, Jadran Antolovic, Croatia's participation as a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research was emphasized. The discussion centered on the successes and challenges facing the Jasenovac Memorial Museum as a platform for launching discussions about Human Rights. In particular, the importance of the promotion of tolerance as a tool to reduce tensions and promote reconciliation was discussed at length. Ambassador Kennedy was briefed about problems surrounding the restitution of cultural assets seized in Croatia during the 1991-1995 wars and taken to Serbia. Of particular concern to GOC officials was the return of items of Cultural Heritage such as icons, religious artifacts, and works of art that were stolen during the wars of the 1990s. Kennedy also raised the need to return Jewish property seized after WWII and emphasized that restitution was a necessary, although complicated, step. Kennedy expressed his hope that the GOC would make a "moral statement" by passing a restitution or compensation law in the months ahead.

¶5. In a luncheon hosted by DCM Vivian Walker, Ms. Snjezana Koren (Historian, Lecturer, and author of elementary school history textbooks), Ms. Alida Matkovic (Head of Multilateral Cooperation at the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport - in charge of Holocaust Education Training), and Ms. Natasa Jovicic (Director of Jasenovac Memorial Center) engaged in a lively and spirited debate about the progress and remaining problems of Holocaust Education and Training in the Republic of Croatia. Disagreement as to the extent and depth of Holocaust Education in the State Educational Curriculum during the Communist era, Tadjman era, and finally, under the current administration was evident among invited guests. While reaching consensus as to the successes or failures of Holocaust Education in the Croatian school system clearly was beyond the scope of this luncheon, all participants agreed that the topic of Holocaust Education is clearly covered more today than in past decades.

¶6. Ambassador Kennedy has cleared on this cable.

BRADTKE